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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4840
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3742
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 3933
RHMFISS/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 000517

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
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P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY
USUN FOR WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER
NSC FOR SHAPIRO, MCDERMOTT
DOD/OSD FOR FLOURNOY/KAHL/DALTON
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/10/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [SY](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: WITH DAS HALE, GEAGEA FEARS HIZBALLAH
WILL USE VIOLENCE TO GET VETO POWER

REF: BEIRUT 500

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) On May 8, Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea proposed to visiting NEA DAS David Hale that the U.S. lend "silent support" to March 14 in the weeks before the June 7 parliamentary elections. He specifically advised us to stop expressing support for "moderates." Admitting the March 14 coalition made mistakes in the selection of its candidates, Geagea expressed his belief that March 14 would win a majority in parliament. He declared that March 14 must prevent Hizballah from achieving its demand of a blocking third because Hizballah would use it to destroy the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. He feared Hizballah would resort to violence in order to secure veto power.

2. (C) Geagea suggested the U.S. wait until after a new government is formed in Lebanon before moving ahead with Syria, and that we wait on appointing an Ambassador to Syria until the next Lebanese government had been formed. Geagea said he did not support direct or indirect Israeli-Lebanese talks, believing Hizballah would launch a war in protest and recommending instead that Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Sheba'a Farms was the best tool to counter Hizballah. Geagea assessed that March 14 suffered minimal residual damage following the recent release of the four generals detained in connection with former PM Rafiq Hariri's assassination. End summary.

DESPITE MARCH 14'S MISTAKES,
IT WILL WIN THE MAJORITY

3. (C) Visiting NEA DAS David Hale, accompanied by Ambassador and PolOff, met with Lebanese Forces (LF) leader Samir Geagea and his advisors Elie Khoury and Joseph Nehme at Geagea's residence in Maarab on May 8. Hale informed Geagea that he was interested in hearing how the U.S. can most wisely support March 14 in the weeks before the June 7 parliamentary elections. Geagea proposed that the U.S. lend silent support to March 14, and refrain from using the phrase "support for

moderates," explaining that the term referred to independent candidates, not March 14.

¶4. (C) Geagea identified March 14's biggest challenge as the absence of a leader to run the coalition. He complained that March 14 and Future Movement leader Saad Hariri acted as the chairman of his own political party at the expense of the greater coalition. Weighing the alternatives, Geagea said that March 14 Druze leader Walid Jumblatt was ineffective because of recently leaked criticisms he made about the March 14 Sunnis and Christians. Geagea said he tried to lead the coalition himself, but noted that his LF capabilities were "limited." Geagea concluded that Saad was the best choice as the March 14 coalition leader because Future has the most number of deputies, but that until now, he has not delivered.

¶5. (C) Geagea was confident that the majority will retain its majority position in the government, but lamented that the coalition made many mistakes, costing what he believed was the potential for a seven or eight seat gain. According to Geagea, March 14 would win all seven seats in Zahle, thanks to Saad's decision to put Geagea in charge of determining the candidate list. Though March 14's leader on its Zahle list, current MP Nicolas Fattouch, was a "lame horse," Geagea was certain March 14 would win in Zahle, notably because of other locally strong candidates and a shift in public opinion away from March 8.

¶6. (C) "President Sleiman failed us in Jbeil," Geagea declared, assessing that independent candidate and former advisor to Sleiman, Nazem Khoury, formed a "weak" list.

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(Note: Khoury's list is firmly independent and excludes March 14 SYG Fares Suaid. End note.) Geagea quoted Sleiman as saying, "It is better for Khoury to lose in Jbeil than win with Suaid."

¶7. (C) Geagea predicted that Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun's decision to form a list in Jezzine that will compete against his March 8 ally, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, cost him Shia votes in Baabda and Jbeil. According to Geagea, the emergence of competing lists was a failure on Hizballah's part to mediate between its Christian ally, Aoun, and its Shia ally, Berri. Geagea relayed that he recently joked with Hizballah MP Mohammed Raad, asking him if he was ready to "give Aoun to March 14." Raad reportedly laughed and answered in the affirmative.

PREVENTING HIZBALLAH FROM
ACQUIRING A BLOCKING THIRD

¶8. (C) If March 14 wins the majority in the next parliament, Geagea posited, Hizballah will insist on "full power." He suggested that March 14 give Shia deputies "full representation, but no veto power." He said he feared Hizballah would resort to violence in order to secure the blocking third. Hizballah intended to destroy the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL), and needed the veto power in order to kill the STL. Referencing Hizballah SYG Hassan Nasrallah's speech the previous week (reftel), Geagea said that the STL threatened Hizballah's existence, and it would do anything to disrupt the proceedings.

¶9. (C) Agreeing, Hale said that March 14's ability to counter Hizballah's actions against the STL depended on the size of March 14's victory in the elections. He added that March 14 needed to develop multiple strategies to challenge Hizballah's weapons. Hale proposed that U.S. engagement with Syria was one way to make Hizballah nervous, as was Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell's efforts to achieve a comprehensive Middle East peace.

PROCEED WITH CAUTION
ON SYRIA...

¶10. (C) Geagea pleaded for the U.S. to refrain from even announcing a decision to reappoint an ambassador to Syria. He suggested that the U.S. hold off until after the elections and Lebanon had formed a new government because he feared Syrian intervention in the process. Responding to Hale's inquiry on the benefits to resolving Ghajar, Geagea downplayed the significance of Ghajar and pointed to Sheba'a Farms as the stronger tool to put Hizballah on the offensive.

...AND RED LIGHT WITH
ISRAELI-LEBANESE TRACK

¶11. (C) Geagea discouraged even an exploratory visit by Special Envoy Mitchell to evaluate prospects for an Israeli-Lebanese track. He believed any effort in this direction, even an indirect one, could give a pretext to Hizballah to destabilize Lebanon. He added that an Israeli-Lebanese track would not benefit the Israeli-Palestinian track, and that this was the most important track and required a tremendous amount of U.S. pressure. Hale assured Geagea of President Obama's commitment to achieving peace and that the U.S. planned to integrate the Arab Peace Initiative into its efforts.

¶12. (C) Geagea acknowledged that framing Israeli-Lebanese talks in the context of implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1701 had a better chance at success, but added that Hizballah demanded Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Sheba'a, a move that required no discussions between the two countries. Hale suggested that an Israeli-Lebanese track

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potentially could corner Hizballah by eliminating its role as the resistance. Disagreeing, Geagea said Hizballah would "make a huge war" if Lebanon appeared to be on a path to opening talks with Israel. He proposed that Mitchell worked on convincing the Israelis to withdraw unilaterally from Sheba'a.

MINIMAL RESIDUAL DAMAGE
FROM RELEASE OF FOUR GENERALS

¶13. (C) Referring to the April 29 release of the four generals detained in connection with Hariri's assassination, Geagea declared that March 14 had turned a defeat into a victory. He explained that March 14 suffered immediately after their release, but the media campaign by the generals and their opposition allies backfired because the public did not like to be reminded of what the generals had represented prior to their detention. Geagea took credit in mitigating the damage by attacking Nasrallah's speech on the generals' release.

¶14. (C) Nevertheless, he said, Hizballah was preparing former General Security chief Jamil Sayyed for a "bigger role," such as become a cabinet minister or a deputy. (Note: Sayyed missed the deadline to register for the June 7 elections, but there are rumors that Hizballah would ask one of its deputies in Baalbeck-Hermel to resign and hold by-elections to elect Sayyed. End note.)

¶15. (U) DAS Hale has cleared this cable.
SISON